

Publicly Accessible Open Space (PAOS)

11/30/2020

Major Themes from October 28 Open Space Steering Committee Discussion

- Four major themes that came out of the Open Space Steering Committee meeting:
Access/perception of public accessibility, useable open space, quality of open space, and purpose.

Draft Definition Considerations for Publicly Accessible Open Space

1. Space that is made available for public use for the purposes of outdoor recreation and leisure, cultural arts, and the protection of environmental, cultural, and historic resources, and which is intended to enhance the health and well-being of the community.
2. Land that has been reserved for the purpose of formal and informal sport and recreation, preservation of natural environments, and/or provision of green space.
3. Space that supports recreation and leisure, natural resources, casual use, historic and cultural resources and is either publicly owned or has guaranteed public access – including parks, plazas, trails, streets, and recreation facilities. (Arlington)

Current Open Space Definition (Zoning Ordinance)

According to section 2-180 of the Zoning Ordinance, open and usable space is that portion of a lot at ground level which is:

- (A) Eight feet or more in width;
- (B) Unoccupied by principal or accessory buildings;
- (C) Unobstructed by other than recreational facilities; and
- (D) Not used in whole or in part as roads, alleys, emergency vehicle easement areas, driveways, maneuvering aisles or off-street parking or loading berths.

The purpose of open and usable space is to provide areas of trees, shrubs, lawns, pathways, and other natural and man-made amenities which function for the use and enjoyment of residents, visitors and other persons.

- Currently: A technical definition in which everything that is not a building or road may be considered 'open space'

Purpose of Publicly Accessible Open Space

- Public open space is intended to promote an appropriate balance between the built environment, public parks and other open spaces intended for respite from urban development, and to protect natural features and preserve the character of the City. (Rockville)
- The City finds that public parks and common open space controls congestion; promotes health and the general welfare; provides adequate light and air; promotes the conservation of natural resources and natural hazard areas; prevents environmental pollution; avoids undue concentration of population; and facilitates the adequate provision of recreation and parks. (City of Frederick)
- Publicly Accessible Open Space serves to increase the City's diverse portfolio of open spaces; to protect and enhance its cultural history; to conserve its natural resources; and to create vibrant and useable spaces; in order to support a more healthy, livable and sustainable City.

Publicly Accessible Open Space should:

- Be a meaningful place to the community
- Be multi-functional and adaptable
- Provide diversity and inclusion
- Encourage social interaction
- Promote health and well being
- Provide equity and accessibility
- Embody environmental sustainability
- Ensure financial sustainability

Characteristics of Publicly Accessible Open Space

- **Accessible** - Areas of a lot that are made accessible to the public every day, year-round, during daylight hours, and that are maintained by the property owner. (Providence, Rhode Island)
 - Entry into the publicly accessible open space is generally unimpeded and/or has ease of physical access to encourage use

- Publicly accessible open space must be with few exceptions available for use and enjoyment by the general public in perpetuity
 - Accessibility may afford scenic views for public enjoyment
- Provides a balance between the built and natural environment. Open spaces shall be designed to provide relief from urban development through natural features or recreational opportunities.
- Useable
 - Provides parks, plazas, active spaces, trails, informal spaces
 - Allows for flexible uses/diversity of use
 - May have accessory structures to support it's intended function (ie. amphitheatre, restrooms, boardwalk, picnic shelter)
 - May have potable water, electrical power, plumbing to support human activities
- Meets community needs and context
 - Context appropriate and meets community needs for recreation, social and cultural activity
- Safety
 - Space that is safe and protects safety of users
 - Encourages use of spaces (we are addressing safety because it affects use)

Ownership/Protection Measures?

- Public ownership; owned by a government or other public body. Land may be zoned as Public Open Space (POS)
- Private ownership with recorded public access easement guaranteeing access
- Conservation easements with public access clauses
- PAOS sites would count towards the City's Open Space Master Plan acreage

What is not counted as Publicly Accessible Open Space?

- Bodies of water
- Roadways
- More than 50% of parking lots and other accessory uses
- Parking lot islands
- Enclosed structures
- Sidewalks by themselves (ie. along roads)? (currently not counted towards Open Space Master Plan acreage)

Four Major Themes from October 28 Open Space Steering Committee

Access/Perception of Public Accessibility

- Hard to tell if it is privately owned or publicly owned
- Define accessibility – anybody, anywhere, at any time can access
- Urban areas include having access to space (less about the space)
- Can access land in some meaningful way, whether we are standing in it or not
- Useable open space
- If I can see it and go to it, then it is accessible
- Desire for it to be ground level – essential for its interpretation of being accessible
- Unless one entire side provides access to the open space
- “not enclosed within a building” – unless it is a direct accessory use like a public restroom that actually directly increases the POS’ accessibility
- “reasonable access”
- Access to the periphery could count as accessible
- Desire for access to nature, water and water sources, cultural and historic activities/elements

Useable Open Space

- Diversity of use – getting more at the quality – can use space for more than on use
- City’s open space portfolio needs to include diversity and diversity of use – and evaluate it geographically
- “not enclosed within a building” – unless it is a direct accessory use like a public restroom that actually directly increases the POS’ accessibility
- Desire for access to nature, water and water sources, cultural and historic activities/elements

Quality of Open Space

- Open space design guidelines
- Provide guidance for quality
- Aspirational – not necessarily requirements
- Better articulate wants to a developer

Purpose

- Charles County – it is not open space if it has to be open space anyway – wetlands
- What we are trying to do with open space – we are trying to protect it, expand it, value it
 - Gives us direction of where we are going
- Value of passiveness is the openness and the value of active space is the programming
- Definitions in active voice – most helpful
- Purpose: Environmental benefits